CD&V members ask for debate on abolition of compulsory voting

Flemish Parliament MP Johan Sauwens (CD&V) wants to seize upon the discussion of the new municipal law in the Flemish Parliament to put the abolition of compulsory voting on the agenda. He wants to table an amendment to Article 24 to that end. Flemish can decide on this issue autonomously, but only in respect of voting rights at municipal level. In the past it has mainly been the Liberal VLD and the Greens who have advocated doing away with compulsory voting. The labour wing of the CD&V, ACW, and the socialist SP.A have in the past mainly been in favour of the obligation to vote out of concern for ‘the vote of the man in the street’. But in the CD&V more and more voices are being heard in favour of calling compulsory voting into question, says De Morgen.

‘What it’s all about, and in this I feel backed by a whole host of studies, is that in this way we can call a halt to the ‘I’ve had enough’ vote,’ says Sauwens. ‘I’m targeting the growing group of voters who are raising their middle finger to politics. This is beginning to have a radical effect on political discourse and also the election campaigns, which are increasingly populist in nature and less and less about the content of the manifestos. I don’t want to take away anyone’s voting rights. I just want to see people who turn their back on politics no longer having a decisive say in the political balance of power’. Sauwens does not yet have the official backing of his party, but says that he has a lot of support for his proposal from other members of parliament. Within the CD&V a not inconsiderable number of ACV-ACW members (the trade union wing, ed.) are reportedly not disinclined towards Sauwens’ idea, even though the ACW itself is in favour of compulsory voting being kept. In this respect the names of MPs such as Etiene Schoupe, Tom Dehaene and Jan Laureys have been mentioned. ‘I’m not saying this in order to give my party an advantage,’ says Sauwens. ‘As far as I’m concerned, it’s not a standpoint against the Vlaams Belang, either. As a politician I experience the leden burden of all those I’ve-had-enough voters. If it emerges that the bulk of them vote for the Vlaams Belang, then I won’t lose any sleep over that party suffering a substantial decline’.

Send your email-address to info@focusonflanders.be and receive a password for www.focusonflanders.be
Municipalities can divide new building land into lots

Groen! feels that it is a direct attack on the few open spaces left in Flanders

The Flemish municipalities can make space for between 86,000 and 100,000 extra houses in the coming years. These houses can be built in the so-called ‘residential extension areas’. If the municipality wants to subdivide these and turn them into building lots, they must first obtain a permit to do so from the Flemish authorities. For just under half of the 5,089 ha of residential extension areas, even that is no longer necessary. Anyway Town and Country Planning Minister Dirk Van Mechelen (VLD) assured that this permit would be issued without any problems. In the Flemish Parliament he presented the Atlas of Residential Extension Areas, which shows the areas on the edges of the current residential nuclei where councils can free up extra building plots the quickest. Van Mechelen is thereby hoping to curb the explosion in the price of building land. Groen! is criticising Van Mechelen’s initiative. The opposition party feels that it is a direct attack on what little remains in terms of open spaces in Flanders, and points out that a further 200,000 houses could be built in the existing residential areas. The party fears that opening up these residential extension areas will increase construction speculation still further (FF).

FRANS DESMET • HET NIEUWSBLAD
1 DECEMBER

When it took office, the Leterme government promised an atlas of the residential extension areas where land could be divided into plots in the short term. On Wednesday Town and Country Planning Minister Dirk Van Mechelen presented the atlas to the Flemish Parliament.

The first edition of the atlas designates 5,089 ha for full development in the short term, plus a further 684 hectares which can be partly developed. That yields almost a hundred thousand new building plots. Forty thousand of these plots are located in an approved parcelisation and may therefore be built on immediately; for the rest permits still have to be applied for. On top of these there are an additional 200,000 plots available in the built-up nuclei:

from a town planning point of view, there is absolutely no objection to these plots being built on.

The very first condition for inclusion in the atlas is that the municipality in which the plot lies must have drawn up at least a draft of its own Municipal Town and Country Planning Structural Plan [gemeentelijk ruimtelijk structuurplan - ‘GRS’ in the jargon]. Municipalities without a GRS are coloured in grey. Van Mechelen reckons that his public atlas will prompt the municipalities to speed up their work in this field. ‘We’re expecting more than half of the municipalities to submit such a plan by the end of 2006.’ That is when municipal elections are due to be held. Since Van Mechelen is expecting his atlas of available building plots to force down - or at least stabilise - the prices of such plots, it is clear that the atlas is also a stick with which to beat GRS-recalcitrant municipalities. For the Flemings’ passion for building is well known, and voters will want to know where they can set down their bricks.

Van Mechelen advocates a council tax on unbuilt-on plots. ‘As mayor I’m already doing that in Kapellen, but I can’t impose that from the government. Our aim is to see to it that 80% of Flemish families own their own home by the end of our mandate. So we should ensure that enough affordable plots are available. Hence this atlas.’ The minister stressed that the maps have been drawn up by his civil servants on entirely objective grounds on the basis of a plethora of criteria, whereby priority has been given to legal rather than spatial-planning factors [areas liable to flooding, nature conservation, European habitat directive, etc.].

WWW.VLAANDEREN.BE/WUGATLAS OR CLICK ON TO WWW. RUIMTELIJKEORDENING.BE
WWW.MPA.GOV.SG

The trade unions will be holding a week of strike action from 2 to 6 December, with demonstrations and work stoppages. On Thursday 8 December there will be a full-day strike in department stores and chain stores. It is the private-sector employees’ trade unions, BBTK (Socialist) and LBC (Christian) who are calling for a strike in the distribution sector, because there are many part-time employees working there who still do not have any early-retirement guarantees. There may also be strike action on that day in other sectors, too. The national union leaders are leaving the choice to strike or not up to their federations. That could be the case in the chemicals and non-profit sectors, and in a number of large metal companies. In the meantime employers are complaining that the strikes are increasingly directed at them and that this is causing them enormous economic harm (FF).

WIM WINCKELMANS • HET NIEUWSBLAD • 30 NOVEMBER

The trade union leaders can no longer keep the lid on the pot. On 29 November ACV Chairman Luc Cortebeeck again made an attempt to calm down the opposition to the Generation Pact, but for the moment the socialist ABVV’s momentum is unstoppable. Cortebeeck has felt for some time that major union protest would not succeed in getting anything more out of the Generation Pact. It briefly looked as though Cortebeeck would get his way, but after talks with ABVV a new programme of strike action could not be avoided. In social dialogue circles, the blame for the new round of action is increasingly being attributed to the internal tensions and urge for profiling within the socialist trade union. This is also causing constant tensions with the Christian ACV which feels that it is being sucked along in the ABVV’s wake.
Europe implacable over manure policy

THE WHOLE OF FLANDERS TO BE DESIGNATED A VULNERABLE AREA

EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas wants the whole of Flanders to be designated a vulnerable area in order to protect the quality of the groundwater and river water against over-manuring. Flemish Environment Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) and Flemish Agriculture Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) presented a new MAP3 manure plan in an attempt to persuade the European commissioner to extend the vulnerable area to include those areas where the poor water quality is ascertained by measurement, but the efforts came to nothing. Dimas was not for turning. In mid-September the European Court of Justice already found Belgium guilty of non-compliance with the European nitrate directive and Dimas reminded the ministers that that judgement has to be observed. In an initial reaction the Farmers’ Union is again asking to go and negotiate with the European authorities. As things stand at the moment, 50% of Flanders is designated as a vulnerable area, where very strict manuring rules apply. If these manuring rules were to apply to the entire territory, the manure surplus would rise from 4.5 to 5.5 million kg of phosphate and from 18 to 32 million kg of nitrate. Stricter manuring rules also mean a loss of revenue and additional manure treatment costs for the farmers. (FF).

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TIJD • 29 NOVEMBER

The nitrate directive obliges the Member States to demarcate rivers and vulnerable areas that suffer from nitrate pollution, especially as a consequence of over-manuring. In these areas farmers are not allowed to spread as much manure. Nitrates and phosphates, which are both found in manure, are nutrients for crops, but in the event of extreme rainfall or over-manuring the nitrate seeps into nearby rivers and then into the groundwater. Nitrate is harmful for the environment and public health. Together with Minister Leterme, Minister Peeters explained the main points of the MAP3 plan to EU Commission member Stavros Dimas. Peeters proposed extending the vulnerable areas from 50 to 60% and to work with flexible maps: zones would be vulnerable or not depending on the results of the water quality measurements. But Dimas left the Flemish no scope for political negotiations and exorted Flanders to make serious adjustments to the proposed MAP3 in order to turn it into an ‘acceptable and workable’ plan. An EU spokesman explained that Europe was still calling for the entire territory of Flanders to be demarcated as a vulnerable area.

EU sources refer to the situation of intensive manuring in Flanders and the Netherlands as running very much in parallel. The Netherlands has also adjusted the manure action plan in recent months, under gentle EU pressure. On 30 November the EU Commission is to approve the latest adaptation of the Dutch Manure Action Plan.

HTTP://EUROPA.EU.IN/COMM/COMMISSION_BARROSODIMAS

What’s to be done about the manure surpluses?

The farmers’ organisations are incensed at the European Commission’s decision that the whole of Flanders should be designated a vulnerable area. They discussed the decision with Flemish Environment Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V), but he is refusing to go along with the Farmers’ Union’s demand to approach the EU authorities again and continue arguing in favour of flexible maps. The whole of Flanders will become a vulnerable area, but he wants to try to secure as many exceptions as possible from the European authorities. By the autumn of 2006 there will be a new Manure Action Plan (MAP) that meets the European rules. That should also see additional manure surpluses done away with. (FF).

DOMINIQUE MINTEN • DE STANDAARD • 30 NOVEMBER

The question is: how do you get rid of these manure surpluses? Should further reductions be made in the livestock population? There are no exact figures on how many animals should disappear - assuming that only this measure will serve to get rid of the manure surplus. Cautious estimates talk of 3.2 million pigs or 0.3 million cattle, since they produce more manure. But only a few manure experts are inclined to back this solution. ‘I'm not in favour of it,’ says Ludwig Lauwers, the manure specialist at the Centre for Agricultural Economics. ‘There are already a good 1 million fewer pigs than there were at the end of the 1990s. That means EUR 40 million less in income or a loss of 1,000 direct jobs and a further 2,000 in the supply companies.’ Or should more manure be treated? In the sector people say that treating manure is barely profitable in the 92 manure treatment companies. But the Flemish Coordination Centre for Manure Treatment (VCM) contradicts that: ‘All our studies show that it is profitable. At least if the companies adopt a long-term perspective. But that is not enough,’ says Isabelle Verman-der. ‘A good 80% of poultry manure production is already treated, but in the pig farms only a quarter is treated.’ And then there are exports. Flemish manure is exported to the Netherlands, France and Germany. ‘But it can no longer be exported to Wallonia. But that is chiefly a political decision,’ says André Bracke of Veva, the association of pig farmers. ‘For Dutch manure is welcome in Wallonia.’

WWW.VCM.BE
WWW2.VLAANDEREN.BE/NEID/SITES/LANDBOUW/WEISWIE/CLE.HTML
Inbev closes small breweries in Belgium

The beer group Inbev, the largest in the world, has announced that it will be reorganising its Belgian subsidiary, with the loss of 232 jobs. The reorganisation is part and parcel of a worldwide strategy of increased efficiency and cost control. The brewery in Hoegaarden where the ‘white’ wheat beer of the same name is brewed, is hardest hit. The brewing and filling of the barrels is moving to the production plant in Jupille. The Belle Vue brewing site in Molenbeek may disappear, too. Last week it had already been announced that 45 jobs were to go in the group’s Leuven head office. The trade unions reacted furiously. Inbev employs 1,744 people in Leuven, 717 in Hoegaarden and 57 in Anderlecht. Six hundred and fifty-five people work in depots and 180 in technical divisions (FF).

RONALD MEEUS • DE MORGEN
1 DECEMBER

Things aren’t going badly for the Leuven brewing group In-Bev. In the first nine months of the year the company posted a consolidated turnover of EUR 8.4 billion, up more than EUR 2 billion on the same period in 2004. And yet the company is reacting as if it were in a period of crisis. A reorganisation, the plans of which were unveiled yesterday by the management, makes provision for the merger of production plants, logistical centres, support services, and marketing, sales and distribution. The company wants to absorb sixty-seven of the 232 announced redundancies by means of internal transfers. For the trade unions, it did not immediately come as a surprise. ‘But the volume they’re quoting was a surprise’, says ACV secretary Luc Gysemberg. ‘This comes as a hard blow, particularly given the fact that things are going so well: the company is trying to cream off as much profit as possible for its shareholders. Interbrew has become more of a bank than a brewer.’ InBev itself also concedes that at the end of the day it’s all about one thing: keeping costs down. ‘Things are going well, but that must also continue to be the case in the future,’ said InBev spokeswoman Lian Verhoeven. ‘We have too much capacity.’

WWW.INBEV.BE

Spector aims to fetch EUR 30 to 40 million

The money collected will be used to repay the debts to the banks and to restructure the company’s photography division.

MICHAEL SEPHIHA • DE TIJD
30 NOVEMBER

Existing shareholders are certainly receiving the number of Spector shares that they want. New investors do not have that certainty. Spector wants to raise between EUR 30 and 40 million. The photographic group is having to deal with the consequences of the decline in analogue photography. It reached agreement on a debt settlement with its banks and is going to the market in search of fresh funds.

The price bracket is well below the price of EUR 3.26 on 29 November. ‘Spector is thereby giving various signals: it is a low subscription price for new investors and it calls on existing investors to take part so that their stake is not diluted. The price also takes account of the risk of the investment: ‘Spector is not completely shot in the case in the future,’ said InBev spokesman Lian Verhoeven. ‘We have too much capacity.’

Spector released the prospectus for the operation. The document states that the group wants to shed 15% (or 119) of the 794 jobs in its photographic division. Eighty to a hundred jobs could go as a result of the conversion of claim by families.

Shareholders’ structure SPECTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shareholders</th>
<th>Before capital rise</th>
<th>at share price of 1.5 euro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOTOINVEST</td>
<td>15.90%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIT (VLERICK)</td>
<td>14.58%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERCATOR</td>
<td>7.94%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KORAMIC [DUMOLIN]</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIVIDUAL INVESTORS</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONVERSION OF CLAIM BY FAMILIES</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of shares</td>
<td>6,761,253</td>
<td>29,973,418</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

source: DS Infografiek

focus on flanders • 26 November - 2 December 2005 • Number 45
Council of State has to judge comments made by Dewinter

In an interview with the weekly The Jewish Week VB chairman Filip Dewinter described his own party as Islamophobic

In the mixed parliamentary committee of control for electoral expenditure, the French-speaking PS is receiving the support of the cdH, SPA and Spirit with a view to stripping the Vlaams Belang of a part of its public allowance. In an interview with the Jewish weekly The Jewish Week VB chairman Filip Dewinter described his own party as Islamophobic and a party that wants to stop Islamisation in Europe. Dewinter predicted that Europe would become as dangerous a place for Jews as Egypt or Algeria. According to his reasoning, Jews would therefore be doing themselves a favour voting for a party like the Vlaams Belang. The PS, the cdH, SPA and Spirit have nine votes in the committee of control and that is enough. The matter is referred to the Council of State if a third of the committee supports the complaint. If they are found guilty, they could lose their party allocation for between three months and a year. The Christian-Democratic CD&V and the VLD are not supporting the initiative. They feel that the Vlaams Belang should be fought in the political arena and not by having it stripped of its public allocation. The reasons behind the SPA and Spirit’s position are clearly very different (FF).

TOM COCHEZ • DE MORGEN • 30 NOVEMBER

‘Spirit cannot accept a political party pitting the Jewish and Muslim communities against each other,’ said Spirit chairman Geert Lambert. ‘With its vote in the committee Spirit wants to show clearly that it does not submit to the comments of a party whose trademark is based on setting sections of the population against each other. There is clear legislation forbidding a political party to make such pronouncements on pain of suspension of the allowance’. Sp.a is voting with its alliance partner, albeit for other reasons. ‘Unlike before, it is no longer up to the political committee to make judgments on this kind of complaints,’ says deputy chairman Philippe De Coene (SPA). ‘In the new procedure we have deliberately extended the role played by the Council of State. It is no longer politicians who are involved. It is the Council of State that has to ascertain whether a complaint is sufficiently weighty and then give a verdict on it.’

The traditional argument that this kind of complaint only serves to push the VB into its victim’s role does not hold water, according to both Spirit and sp.a. ‘Strategic considerations may not play any role in such decisions,’ says Geert Lambert. ‘The law has been introduced precisely to avoid politicians being both in the dock and in the judge’s chair. What is more, the Council of State has written that itself in its commentary,’ says De Coene.

Vanhecke attacks PS at Vlaams Belang’s economic conference

FF EDITOR

Fewer taxes, less state involvement and unions with less power. Those were the main policy points underpinning the Vlaams Belang’s economic programme which were unveiled at the party’s conference in Ghent. According to chairman Frank Vanhecke, with this economic programme the party has taken a new and important step. But he explained that this economic component did not in any way mean that the Vlaams Blok had now suddenly become a socio-economic party. The engine driving the party remains Flemish nationalism, Van Hecke said. A country such as Belgium can only be administered poorly, Flanders needs its own social and economic policy. The rejection of Islam also remains a driving force in the party. According to Vanhecke, the disturbances in France show that the Vlaams Belang’s analysis of the immigration policy is the only correct one. If something isn’t done, the clash of cultures is inevitable. Therefore he says that the advance of Islam must be stopped now. After Islam, he turned his attack on the French-speaking PS, which has been wracked by scandals. And finally the trade unions got it in the neck. For example, if the Vlaams Belang were in power, they would no longer pay out the unemployment benefits.

New divorce law makes divorce easier and cheaper

FF editor

The Federal Government has approved a bill tabled by Justice Minister Laurette Onkelinx (PS), which simplifies the procedure for divorce. In this bill the only ground for divorce is the so-called ‘permanent breakdown of marriage’. This replaces the current divorce procedures on the grounds of facts (adultery, two years actually living apart) and divorce by mutual consent. Both spouses may file for divorce if they have not been living together for six months or if they make two statements before the court, with an interval of three months between them. A petition for divorce by one of the spouses requires one year of actual separation. In the case of a permanent breakdown of the marriage, the question of blame only plays a role in the allocation of maintenance. A person found to be to blame for the marriage breaking down may never receive maintenance. It is thus no longer the partner demanding maintenance who has to prove the other partner’s blame. For that matter, entitlement to maintenance may only last as long as the marriage lasted.

www.just.fgov.be
No solution for noise pollution until 2008

It is quite possible that there will be no new agreement until 2008 on the spreading of night-time noise caused by aeroplanes landing and taking off at Zaventem. The Flemish, Brussels and Federal Governments have been debating for months over flight routes and runways, but there is still no solution in sight. An overall agreement is only possible if there is also political courage and that is lacking at the moment, says Federal Transport Minister Renaat Landuyt (SP.A) in an interview with De Tijd (28 November). In 2008 there could be a breakthrough, for that is when the Courier company DHL will have cut back its head office in Zaventem. By 2008 there will also be an official body able to lay down the flight procedures and there should also be a flight law. He is preparing himself with a view to being forced constantly to adjust the current flight distribution plan until 2008 under pressure from legal decisions, which are being forced by lobby groups. He warns of the competition from railways for the airport. It only takes a moment to reach airports in neighbouring countries from Belgium. Perhaps in that way Zaventem solves the problem itself, says the minister. The new flight law, which was approved on 25 November, should give the government the necessary legal support in the legal battles it is waging with the pressure groups. Since the flight distribution plan came into force in 2003, local residents and the Brussels government have already forced changes to the plan on 10 occasions (FF).

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TIJD • 26 NOVEMBER

According to Landuyt, who is a jurist, the judgements exposed the same obstacle every time: the government could never prove to the court that the flight procedures that had been chosen were correct because there were no criteria that the government had to meet to establish the flight paths. Landuyt wants to fill this lacuna with the flight law. ‘In this way we’ll secure stability for the airport and the Belgian economy’, said Landuyt yesterday after the weekly council of ministers meeting. The airport of Zaventem is one of the most important employers in Belgium. Landuyt added that the flight law was also aimed at offering local residents certainty. After all, at the moment every legal decision results in the use of runways and flight paths being tinkered with. ‘For complete clarity: the law does not establish the flight procedures themselves - for example the current flight distribution plan. But it does lay down the decision-making procedure that has to be followed to establish flight paths’.

In this way the proposed flight procedures have to comply with safety criteria. They also have to take account of the capacity at the airport. ‘But at night the capacity criterion is made subordinate to the noise criterion,’ Landuyt stressed. The proposed amendment should also take account of the impact on the health of the local residents and the environment. The studies on safety, capacity and health will be forwarded to the safety body Belgocontrol, the airport operator BIAC and an advisory committee to be set up, which should provide advice and recommendations on the flight procedures. As his point of departure Landuyt is not starting with a blank sheet of paper, but with the current flight distribution plan.

Wintry weather causes power failures

The wintry weather led to various power failures in Flanders last weekend. On the evening of Friday 25 November the power supply between the Netherlands and Belgium failed, leading to power cuts in the following hours in various places in Antwerp, East Flanders and Flemish Brabant. In the city of Sint-Niklaas entire districts were without electricity for almost four hours. The manager of the high-tension network Elia established that 2% of its network failed. Called to account by Federal Energy Minister Marc Verwilghen, Elia put the blame on a combination of extreme weather conditions: wind, temperatures around freezing, heavy snowfall and high atmospheric humidity.

The cause was often a short circuit caused by two cables touching each other. This happens when a layer of ice on the cable comes loose, the cable bends upwards like an elastic band, touches another cable, and causes a short circuit. In other places the cable weakened under the weight of snow and snapped. In total the electric current was broken in 24 lines of the 500 km or so of high-tension lines in our country.

ENRICHMENT: The Brussels Government is seeking a solution to the noise pollution caused by aeroplanes landing and taking off at Zaventem.

Flanders and Brussels want new flight distribution plan

In a reaction to the interview with minister Landuyt, Flemish Environment Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) and Brussels Minister-President Picqué (PS) claimed that they were prepared to seek an agreement on the distribution of the flights. Peeters stated that the Flemish Government was prepared to work out a solution in the short term, but left the ball in the Brussels Government’s court. Picqué is urging for an amendment of the current distribution plan. However, he denies that there is a lack of political courage. The Brussels negotiators have made constructive proposals, but the Flemish negotiators would invariably come along and impose unrealistic counter-proposals. Quoted in La Libre Belgique on 28 November, the Brussels Economic Affairs Minister Benoît Cerexhe (CDh) demanded a solution before the beginning of 2006. If none were forthcoming, he said, the Brussels Government would demand that non-compliance penalties be imposed on the Federal Government for every aeroplane exceeding the Brussels noise standards. The Dutch-speaking ministers in the Brussels Government are opposing this.

ENVIRONMENT

AVIATION/NOISE POLLUTION

No solution for noise pollution until 2008

It is quite possible that there will be no new agreement until 2008 on the spreading of night-time noise caused by aeroplanes landing and taking off at Zaventem. The Flemish, Brussels and Federal Governments have been debating for months over flight routes and runways, but there is still no solution in sight. An overall agreement is only possible if there is also political courage and that is lacking at the moment, says Federal Transport Minister Renaat Landuyt (SP.A) in an interview with De Tijd (28 November). In 2008 there could be a breakthrough, for that is when the Courier company DHL will have cut back its head office in Zaventem. By 2008 there will also be an official body able to lay down the flight procedures and there should also be a flight law. He is preparing himself with a view to being forced constantly to adjust the current flight distribution plan until 2008 under pressure from legal decisions, which are being forced by lobby groups. He warns of the competition from railways for the airport. It only takes a moment to reach airports in neighbouring countries from Belgium. Perhaps in that way Zaventem solves the problem itself, says the minister. The new flight law, which was approved on 25 November, should give the government the necessary legal support in the legal battles it is waging with the pressure groups. Since the flight distribution plan came into force in 2003, local residents and the Brussels government have already forced changes to the plan on 10 occasions (FF).

KATRIEN VERSTRAETE • DE TIJD • 26 NOVEMBER

According to Landuyt, who is a jurist, the judgements exposed the same obstacle every time: the government could never prove to the court that the flight procedures that had been chosen were correct because there were no criteria that the government had to meet to establish the flight paths. Landuyt wants to fill this lacuna with the flight law. ‘In this way we’ll secure stability for the airport and the Belgian economy’, said Landuyt yesterday after the weekly council of ministers meeting. The airport of Zaventem is one of the most important employers in Belgium. Landuyt added that the flight law was also aimed at offering local residents certainty. After all, at the moment every legal decision results in the use of runways and flight paths being tinkered with. ‘For complete clarity: the law does not establish the flight procedures themselves - for example the current flight distribution plan. But it does lay down the decision-making procedure that has to be followed to establish flight paths’.

In this way the proposed flight procedures have to comply with safety criteria. They also have to take account of the capacity at the airport. ‘But at night the capacity criterion is made subordinate to the noise criterion,’ Landuyt stressed. The proposed amendment should also take account of the impact on the health of the local residents and the environment. The studies on safety, capacity and health will be forwarded to the safety body Belgocontrol, the airport operator BIAC and an advisory committee to be set up, which should provide advice and recommendations on the flight procedures. As his point of departure Landuyt is not starting with a blank sheet of paper, but with the current flight distribution plan.

Wintry weather causes power failures

The wintry weather led to various power failures in Flanders last weekend. On the evening of Friday 25 November the power supply between the Netherlands and Belgium failed, leading to power cuts in the following hours in various places in Antwerp, East Flanders and Flemish Brabant. In the city of Sint-Niklaas entire districts were without electricity for almost four hours. The manager of the high-tension network Elia established that 2% of its network failed. Called to account by Federal Energy Minister Marc Verwilghen, Elia put the blame on a combination of extreme weather conditions: wind, temperatures around freezing, heavy snowfall and high atmospheric humidity.

The cause was often a short circuit caused by two cables touching each other. This happens when a layer of ice on the cable comes loose, the cable bends upwards like an elastic band, touches another cable, and causes a short circuit. In other places the cable weakened under the weight of snow and snapped. In total the electric current was broken in 24 lines of the 500 km or so of high-tension lines in our country.

Flanders and Brussels want new flight distribution plan

In a reaction to the interview with minister Landuyt, Flemish Environment Minister Kris Peeters (CD&V) and Brussels Minister-President Picqué (PS) claimed that they were prepared to seek an agreement on the distribution of the flights. Peeters stated that the Flemish Government was prepared to work out a solution in the short term, but left the ball in the Brussels Government’s court. Picqué is urging for an amendment of the current distribution plan. However, he denies that there is a lack of political courage. The Brussels negotiators have made constructive proposals, but the Flemish negotiators would invariably come along and impose unrealistic counter-proposals. Quoted in La Libre Belgique on 28 November, the Brussels Economic Affairs Minister Benoît Cerexhe (CDh) demanded a solution before the beginning of 2006. If none were forthcoming, he said, the Brussels Government would demand that non-compliance penalties be imposed on the Federal Government for every aeroplane exceeding the Brussels noise standards. The Dutch-speaking ministers in the Brussels Government are opposing this.
Opinion poll strengthens CD&V/N-VA’s position

FF EDITOR

In a new opinion poll carried out by the VRT/De Standaard sounding out the voting intentions of Flemings, the CD&V/NVA alliance of Christian-Democrats and Flemish Nationalists fares extremely well. The alliance is up 3.2% on its result in the regional elections of 2004. This means it remains clearly the largest political formation in Flanders. With 23.9% the extreme right-wing Vlaams Belang remains the undisputed number 2, but does fall back 0.4% compared with 2004. The purple parties, which are also in office at federal level, fare less well. Whilst the liberal VLD was given a hammering in the May 2005 poll and fell back to 18.5%, it is now the turn of the left-wing alliance of SP.A/Spirit to take a dive. The alliance does equal the rating it secured in the 2004 elections, but for 0.1% (19.8%), but loses 2.2% in relation to the last poll. The VLD is now as much as 1.7% below its 2004 election result. The Greens are stagnating on 7.5%.

Minister-President Yves Leterme (CD&V) heads the popularity poll among Flemish politicians, ahead of his party colleague and old campaigner Jean-Luc Dehaene, and the Socialist trio of Freya Vanden Bossche, Steve Stevaert and Johan Vande Lanotte. Federal Prime Minister Verhofstadt (VLD) is foundering in sixth position.

POLL

Poll De Standaard/VRT: voting intentions November 2005

Source: DS Infografiek

PUBLIC BROADCASTER

VRT board is given more power

IT thus appears that it is MEDIA MINISTER GEERT BOURGEOS (N-VA), and not the VRT’S MANAGING DIRECTOR TONY MARY, who has won the argument

T he coalition partners in the Flemish Government have all ranged themselves behind the rough draft of the new VRT decree after all. It thus appears that it is Media Minister Geert Bourgeois (N-VA), and not the VRT’s Managing Director Tony Mary, who has won the argument. He had to write off his original plan of turning the public broadcasting corporation into an ‘external independent agency’ and fitting the board of directors into the Better Prepared for Management operation - Bourgeois is also civil service affairs minister. In the toned-down rough draft, the duties of the board of directors and Managing Director Tony Mary are very clearly defined. From now on the board of directors has its say in strategic decisions, and can itself decide what decisions fall under that category. A very topical example is the launch of theme channels. After all, Mary plainly demanded EUR 200 to 250 million to carry through his digital plans, which included eight theme channels. The powers of the managing director are also listed in the draft. He is given the guarantee that personnel policy and programming are exclusively his domain. This means that any political meddling in programming via the board of directors is ruled out, says Bourgeois (FF).

LEO BONTE • DE STANDAARD
26 NOVEMBER

If the decree is approved, the board of directors can henceforth take decisions itself, and no longer solely on the managing director’s proposal. The board of directors can also be enlarged by the inclusion of no more than three independent experts in the field of media or company policy. The managing director’s powers are also expressly defined. And it is explicitly stated that the managing director is exclusively authorised to determine the personnel policy and establish the broadcasting plan and the range of programmes broadcast. In this way Bourgeois wants to rule out any debates about political interference via the board of directors. The management has full powers to continue to manage the VRT independently,’ said Bourgeois.

A government commissioner continues to oversee the VRT’s compliance with its public service duty, but from now on will also exercise this function in respect of all activities, including merchandising and sideline activities. These activities are also clearly laid down in the new decree, and must aim to support the programmes or services within the public service duty. They may not cause a serious distortion of competition and should be able to pay their own way. Separate accounts should ensure financial transparency. The rough draft of the new VRT decree will first go to the Council of State, and then to the Flemish Parliament.

www.vrt.be
WWW.MINISTERGEERTBOURGEOS.BE

SOURCE: DS Infografiek
**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE**

- **6 December**: Yann Tierson, AB, Brussels; info: www.abconcerts.be 
  02/548.24.24
- **6 December**: Jazz Night at Bozar with Philip Catherine Guitar orchestra, Nathalie Lorier and Toots Thielemans and Brussels Jazz Orchestra, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **7 December**: Impressing the Czar by W. Forsythe, Ballet of Flanders, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **7 December**: Hilary Hahn violin - Natalie Zhu piano with Eugene Ysaÿe, Georges Enescu, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **7 December**: Nathan Milstein, WA Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **8, 9, 10, 13, 14 and 15 December**: piano, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **9 December**: Michaela Ursuleasa, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **9 December**: Manchester Opera, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **12 December**: Jan Fabre, Histoire des Larmes, De Singel, Antwerp, info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **12 December**: Anima Eterna conducted by Jos Van Immerseel with van Beethoven (Ouverture and 4th Symphony), Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **12 December**: Il Fondamento conducted by Paul Dombrecht with Uns ist ein Himmel, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **12 December**: Daniel Kwartet with Nikolay Yakovlevich Myakovsky, Samuilovich Weinberg, and Tchaikovsky / Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **12 December**: Zoumana Teteta Trio [Mali], concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp, info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **12 December**: Veronique Doisneau/Ciszelle, Bel, Salamon en Leroy, Kaaitheater, Brussels; info: www.kaattheater.be
- **9 December**: Gerardo Nunez, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **10 December**: Jerusalem Quartet, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **10 December**: Turkish Divas, concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **13 December**: Frank Brayley, Renad Capaçon, Gautier Capaçon (piano, violin and cello) with Ravel, DeSingel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **14 December**: Jerusalem Quartet, DeSingel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **14 December**: Susheela Raman, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **15 December**: André Cabaço [Mozambique] concert, Zuiderpershuis, Antwerp; info: www.zuiderpershuis.be
- **16 December**: Michaela Ursuleasa, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be
- **19, 20, 21 and 22 December**: Wim Van denkeybus (dance) with Puur, De Singel, Antwerp; info: www.desingel.be 03/248.28.28
- **15 December**: Impressing the Czar by W. Forsythe, Ballet of Flanders, Concertgebouw, Antwerp; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- **13 December**: Art nouveau and Design 1830-1958, Museum, Brussels; info: 02 737 78 33
- **13 December**: Sixty anonymous photographs. Some-what that turns up without being invit-
ed, Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **9 December**: Until 31 December: Impressing the Czar by W. Forsythe, Ballet of Flanders, Concertgebouw, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- **10 December**: Until 31 December: Tchaikovsky by Paul Dombrecht, Photo Museum, Antwerp; info: www.fotomuseum.be 03/242.93.00
- **10 December**: Until 22 January: The Trans-Siberian Express: Fascinating facts about the route to Vladivostock, KMSKG, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: 02/742.72.11
- **9 December**: Until 8 January: Sabena, Art Nostalgie, Photo Museum, Antwerp; info: www.fotomuseum.be 03/242.93.00
- **9 December**: Until 22 January: Avant-garde from Russia 1900-1935, exhibition, Bozar, info: www.bozar.be
- **9 December**: Until 23 December: Expo, Handelsbeurs, Ghent; info: www.handelsbeurs.be 02/507.85.95
- **9 December**: Until 7 February: The Blue Rose – Symbolism in Russia, Museum of Elsa, info: 03/51.64.22
- **9 December**: Until 4 December: Information/Transformation, Extra City, Antwerp, info: 0484/42.10.70
- **9 December**: Until 31 December: Extravagant, rediscovery of the Antwerp Mannequins, KMSKG, Antwerp, info: 03/238.78.09
- **9 December**: Until 31 January: Rubens, Jordaeens and Van Dyck, Arentshuis, Bruges, info: www.brugge.be, 050/44.87.12
- **9 December**: Until 23 December: The art nouveau front as a complete work of art, Museum for Architecture, Brussels; info: 02/642.24.75
- **9 December**: Until 31 December: Between Photo and Film, exhibition, KMKG, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: www.kmkg.be
- **9 December**: Until 4 December: The big umbrella by Aleksandra Mir, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be
- **9 December**: Until 31 January: The big umbrella by Aleksandra Mir, SMAK, Ghent, info: www.smak.be

**EXPO**

- From 5 February onwards: The memory of Congo, the colonial period, exhibition, Museum for Central Africa (Tervuren); info: www.tervuren.be
- Until 31 January: Master pieces from the Dutch treasure room, KMSK, Antwerp, info: www.kmsk.be
- Until 2008: Art at the Frontline 1914-1918, Royal Army and Military History Museum, Brussels; info: 02 737 78 33
- Until 2008: From Tsar to Emperor: 300 objects that illustrate the period of Russian history from Ivan the Terrible to Catherine the Great (1547-1796), Bozar, Brussels; info: www.bozar.be
- December: Robins, Jordaeens and Van Dyck, Arentshuis, Bruges, info: www.brugge.be, 050/44.87.12
- Until 8 January: Sabena, Art Nostalgie, Photo Museum, Antwerp; info: www.fotomuseum.be 03/242.93.00
- Until 31 December: Rubens, Jordaeens and Van Dyck, Arentshuis, Bruges, info: www.brugge.be, 050/44.87.12
- Until 23 December: The art nouveau front as a complete work of art, Museum for Architecture, Brussels; info: 02/642.24.75
- Until 31 December: Between Photo and Film, exhibition, KMKG, Cinquantenaire, Brussels; info: www.kmkg.be
- Until 4 December: Information/Transformation, Extra City, Antwerp, info: 0484/42.10.70
- Until 31 December: Extravagant, rediscovery of the Antwerp Mannequins, KMSKG, Antwerp, info: 03/238.78.09
- Until 31 January: Something, exhibition, Sixy anonymous photographs. Something that turns up without being invited, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be

**Focus on Flanders** provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Kasteelstraat 87, 9000 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail. The website www.focusonflanders.be contains an electronic archive of published articles.

**Other Smak exhibitions:**
- Until 9 January: Sergei Bratkov (Rus), www.smak.be (09) 221 17 03
- Until 9 January: Panaamarenko, retrospective, KMSM, Brussels; info: 02/508.32.11 www.fine-arts-museum.be
- Until 22 January: Avant-garde from Russia 1900-1935, exhibition, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be
- Until 31 December: Rubens, Jordaeens and Van Dyck, Arentshuis, Bruges, info: www.brugge.be, 050/44.87.12
- Until 29 January: Exhibition: Toys in girls’ hands, Toy museum, Mechelen, info: 015/55.70.75 www.speelgoedmuseum.be
- Until 5 February: The Blue Rose – Symbolism in Russia, Museum of Elsa; info: 03/51.64.22
- Until 4 December: Information/Transformation, Extra City, Antwerp, info: 0484/42.10.70
- Until 8 January: Something, exhibition, Sixy anonymous photographs. Something that turns up without being invited, Bozar, Brussels, info: www.bozar.be

**Translation: Eurologos**
**Printing: Drukkerij Lannoo nv, Tielt**
**Responsible editor:** Luc Demeester, Mark.
**48 issues**
**Subscription rate printed edition + 2 e-mail editions + password to search the archive (www.focusonflanders.be): 233 euro**
**Either transfer these to account no.: 473-1010001-19 with the KBC in Roeselare**
**Or give us the number and expiry date of your credit card (Visa/Eurocard):**
**Telephone: 051/44 42 99 Fax: 051/40.11.53** E-mail: frank.vandecaveye@lannoo.be